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FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9001
INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1870
RUEHBG/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1857
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1794
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1887
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1851
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1748
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1894
RUEHF/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1551
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1567
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1366
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1838
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1761
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 1122
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SUBJECT: TAJIK PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION REPORT #1

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The polls have yet to close, but Tajikistan's presidential election seems to suffer from many of the same problems as the 2005 parliamentary election. The pre-election period did witness positive cooperation between international organizations (especially the United Nations and IFES) and the Central Election Commission, with some improvements to procedures and wide-spread poll worker training and voter awareness programs. However, the resulting high turnout, and commitment on the part of some election officials to implement proper procedures, has been marred by pervasive evidence of family and proxy voting and lack of participation from true opposition political parties, and also some instances of ballot box stuffing and political coercion. Two days prior to the election, three Democratic Party of Tajikistan officials were imprisoned for staging a demonstration in front of the Ministry of Justice protesting the ministry's decision to recognize a rival faction of the party. Embassy observers, who are also registered as OSCE observers, were deployed to the Qurgon-Teppa, Kulyob, Istaravshan, Garm and Vahdat regions. Embassy staff also visited Dushanbe polling stations where the mood was festive. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) In almost all polling stations in Dushanbe, loud festive music blared from stereos, some featured live musicians. At some stations, dancing girls in traditional costume even performed. In Vaksh district, PolOff reported loud music woke residents up in the early hours summoning them to the polling stations. Flowers were handed out to first time voters and gifts were granted to senior citizen voters. Overall, the mood and atmosphere were festive. Embassy observers have not reported any incidents of violence.

¶3. (U) Typical voting patterns saw most Tajiks casting their ballots during the first half of the day. Voters ranged from the young, minimum 18 years of age, to senior citizens. Women were also well represented. Some students at the Pedagogical

Institute in Dushanbe waited for up to 3 hours to vote. By 2:00 pm local time November 6, the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda reported that 76% of registered voters have already cast their ballot. According to Tajik law, a minimum of 50% voter turn-out assures the legitimacy of the election.

VOTING PROBLEMS- A REPEAT OF PREVIOUS ELECTIONS

¶4. (SBU) Generally, EmbOffs had access to all polling stations and were welcomed with the usual gracious Tajik hospitality and had their fair share of tea and plov. Polling stations appeared organized and well-managed. Most officials were open, answered questions and were eager to demonstrate to observers the "free and fair" election process. EmbOffs report that some OSCE observers were denied access to military polling stations.

¶5. (SBU) The main problem that reoccurs in every Tajik election is family voting and proxy voting. Although illegal, the pervasive cultural mentality that heads of households can vote for other members makes family voting prevalent in Tajikistan. An Embassy source commented, "It is impossible to think that a Tajik wife would vote differently than her husband." At nearly all polling stations, EmbOffs witnessed evidence of family voting and proxy voting. Between 10 percent to well over 50 percent of votes cast were by family voting or proxy voting. Polling officials told PolOff that they know this is wrong, but are reluctant to do anything about it because they understand if a family member cannot come to vote. It is not only men who cast votes for the family; observers saw many instances of women casting multiple ballots, perhaps in some cases on behalf of male family members working abroad. In some cases, election officials did strictly prohibit this practice.

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¶6. (SBU) EmbOffs witnessed three blatant acts of ballot stuffing and indications that a number of other boxes may have been stuffed. Ballot boxes are weakly secured and can be easily tampered with. Tajik rules allow registration at the polling place upon proof of residency, but not all officials were vigilant about checking identification and allowed some people to vote even though their names were not on the official register. In one extreme case, EmbOffs walked into a polling station at 5:00pm, three hours before polls closed to find officials stuffing open ballot boxes and falsifying signatures on the registrar's list. The official tried to justify his action by explaining that Tajikistan is a young democracy with a lot to learn. He was irate and chased EmbOffs out of the station. This is a clear indication of where Rahmonov's message to conduct free and fair election was defied by at least one eager-to-please local official.

¶7. (SBU) Embassy Officers observing in southern Tajikistan reported that in one town, prior to election day, election officials campaigned and urged voters to vote for Rahmonov, then on election day, voters were bused into the polling stations to vote. Although campaign posters are prohibited in polling stations the day of the election, EmbOffs in the same region noticed large campaign posters for Rahmonov.

¶8. (SBU) Noticeably, most signs in polling stations were in Tajik, not Russian. In northern regions, some signs were also in Kyrgyz. No provisions were made for people with poor eyesight or illiterate voters. Instructions on how to vote were not clearly displayed and PolOff witnessed voters query on how to mark the ballot. In Tajikistan negative voting is employed, where voters cross off the names of candidates they do not want to be president.

¶9. (U) Some Embassy observers who also participated in the Parliamentary 2005 elections noted that there are more women voters this year. This could be indicative of a higher turnout by women or by the fact that more men are abroad as labor migrants.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY LEADERS IMPRISONED DAYS BEFORE ELECTION

¶10. (U) Plain clothes law enforcement authorities broke up a protest orchestrated by the Democratic Party of Tajikistan November 4 in front of the Ministry of Justice. Police arrested Rajabi Mirzo, head of the DPT's Dushanbe chapter and also editor of the party's newspaper, Adolat. They also arrested Timur Iskandarov, the younger brother of the party's imprisoned chairman, Mahmadrizi Iskandarov, and Khairiddin Gulyaev, the Deputy Head of the DPT's Dushanbe chapter. Media reports say the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan (SDPT) and the unregistered faction of the Socialist Party of Tajikistan (SPT) also helped to organize the protest.

¶11. (U) Media reports say that five people held banners protesting the Ministry's decision to recognize the new faction of the DPT headed by Masud Sobirov. Twenty people gathered in a show of support at the side of the building. Mirzo alleged that the party's phones were tapped as only a tight circle of people knew about the planned protest and informed the media only 30 minutes before the action.

¶12. (U) The protest which only lasted a few minutes before police broke it up had been peaceful. According to Tajik law though, it is illegal to organize a demonstration unless a group has received permission from the government. The three men have been detained and sent to a city prison. They will be held for up to fifteen days.

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POLITICAL PARTIES ABSENT FROM OBSERVATION

¶13. (U) OSCE/ODIHR and CIS observers were frequently seen around Dushanbe and out in the regions. Notably, some CIS observers are able to travel around town using official government plated vehicles. Several bilateral missions also have observers including the Chinese and Kazakh Embassies.

¶14. (SBU) Embassy observers have seen members of the president's People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT) at several polling station as well as members of the Communist Party of Tajikistan and the Party of Economic Reform of Tajikistan. PolOff noted that in Qurgon-Teppe, prior to election day, a People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan member confessed that he was told by the government that he was accredited to observe as a Communist Party member and not as a PDPT member.

¶15. (SBU) "Opposition" political parties have been conspicuously absent from polling stations. Media sources say the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan has only sent observers to one or two polling stations, near former chairman Nuri's home in Dushanbe. Muhiddin Kabiri, the party's current chairman, has been out of the country during the important election day and several days leading up to the election. Embassy observers encountered one Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan observer, but none from other parties.

¶16. (U) Polls will officially close at 8:00pm local time, at which point ballot boxes will be opened, votes counted and the results sent to the district election commissions and back to Dushanbe. Both the Commonwealth of Independent States and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe missions will give statements at 11:00am and 2:30pm respectively, November 7 on preliminary findings.

JACOBSON